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[Reconnecting the city: the historic urban landscape approach and the future of urban heritage \[Book review\].](#)

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BOOK REVIEW

Reconnecting the city: The historic urban landscape approach and the future of urban heritage, by Francesco Bandarin and Ron van Oers (eds.), Oxford, Wiley Blackwell, 2014, 376 pp., £55.00, ISBN 978-1-118-38398-8

Cities have gained a central place in cultural, economic, environmental, and social policymaking and there is wide and trans-disciplinary interest in regional and urban cultures (Soja, 2003; 2011). In the 1980s, cities became a lens into the larger economic and political shifts of an emergent new global era, which increased the urge to rebuild entire urban centres and prepare them to become platforms for the current urban century (Sassen, 2011). Cities thus became strategic in the increasingly complex nature of urban management. Larger cities have been shown to magnify the opportunity for social and cultural interaction and thereby increase the productivity and scope of their material resources and human labour (Bettencourt, 2013; Ortman et al., 2014). The subsequent development pressures in urban areas reinvigorate the need to understand the urban landscape as a social construct that is an important part of cultural identity. Therefore, the effective planning and management of cities is becoming ever more important.

Against the backdrop of global and on-going transformation in urban and urbanizing areas, *Reconnecting the city* aims to deepen the understanding of urban heritage conservation. This new book by Bandarin and van Oers is a sequel to their 2012 book entitled *The historic urban landscape: Managing heritage in an urban century*. Both books focus on the position of urban conservation in the complex management of cities and are strongly related to the UNESCO 2011 Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape and corresponding management approach (WHC, 2015; WHITRAP, 2015). The authors tap into a familiar debate in cultural heritage management: the precarious balance between development and conservation. The book builds on the assumption that “development without the conservation of key resources cannot be sustainable, while conservation cannot succeed without development to sustain its efforts” (p. 318). While the 2012 book provides a history of the development of a landscape approach in urban conservation, *Reconnecting the city* is concerned with the application of this landscape approach across a range of disciplines and themes. By including a selection of contributors from widely varied backgrounds, disciplines and affiliations, the editors provide a pallet of perspectives

on the historic urban landscapes approach. Based on this, an interdisciplinary future agenda for urban conservation is set.

Reconnecting the city brings together fifteen chapters and incorporates a variety of interviews and case studies. It is clear that Bandarin and van Oers are strong advocates for the Historic Urban Landscape approach, and they undoubtedly selected a range of authors who would underline rather than challenge their own perspective. In that sense, a critical approach and tone are absent from the book. However, the book is much more than a promotional tool to explain the concept and persuade those in the field, either in academia or practice, to support and implement it. Renowned scholars and researchers in the field introduce the historic urban landscape through the lens of their own expertise. This shows that the landscape discourse, though developing, still needs maturing when it comes to crossovers with heritage disciplines. The book stimulates and highlights the need for theorizing, analysing, and cooperating in both the problem-setting and the problem-solving heritage-related disciplines.

The book comprises two sections. The first section introduces and provides insight into the various themes and disciplines involved. While the editors chose to close this section with the chapter entitled *Cities as Cultural Landscapes* by Ken Taylor (pp. 179-202), I would recommend starting there, as this chapter explains the new line of thinking about heritage most clearly and Taylor has been writing on the topic extensively over the past decade (most recently in Taylor et al., 2014). The current trend and main message strongly reflected throughout the entire book is to no longer limit the management and planning of heritage to protecting valuable – often synonymous with beautiful or old – objects and ensembles. The main aim of the alternative landscape approach is to enhance the quality of the cultural landscape, the human environment, while acknowledging its dynamic nature and need for change to allow communities to (continue to) prosper. This places cultural heritage management within the *landscape* discourse. The landscape is understood as integrating cultural, social, economic and environmental factors in space and time, and as inherently dynamic and ever-changing. A landscape approach, therefore, is not about transformation in itself, but about guiding the nature of transformation, and it addresses the quality of the (urban) landscape and the relationships forming it (Cortina, 2011; Dalglish, 2012; Agnoletti, 2014). Heritage management as a cultural practice builds on cultural identity and cultural values, which are constituted by cultural and natural, tangible and intangible, elements in the landscape.

Once the reader is more familiar with the landscape perspective, the other chapters in the first section (covering archaeology, geology, morphology, climate change, intangible heritage, and planning and management) can be appreciated at their true value. As is often the case in edited books that aim to provide various perspectives on one concept, it is sometimes difficult to compare or synthesize the different contributions. Further comparison and synthesis would make an interesting next step and might support Bandarin and Van Oers' effort to break down the disciplinary silos.

To operationalize the landscape concept for urban heritage management, the second section of *Reconnecting the city* starts building a toolkit for the application of a landscape approach. This is not a highly academic, reflexive or critical section, but a very useful one. Chapters Nine to Twelve in particular set out a good overview of the wide variety of workable methods and tools already available in the various fields affiliated with urban heritage management. These chapters introduce a wide range of possibilities, from state-of-the-art digital techniques for geospatial mapping, to more low-tech – but no less complicated – ethnographic methods for community mapping. However, given their practical bias, a more schematic overview on the spectrum of possibilities would have been a welcome addition, if only to reveal gaps in the available toolkit.

The book ends with a 20-point research agenda for planners and designers. This agenda combines applied and practical issues, such as the more effective application of digital techniques or the development of integrated management plans. It also addresses fundamental questions regarding the intellectual and ethical developments required to develop more sustainable cities. This indisputably represents a challenging agenda for both practitioners and academics. While the landscape discourse is already familiar to some disciplines, *Reconnecting the city* also demonstrates that this approach is still in its infancy, and the book thus provides a solid introduction to the landscape approach. Let's hope it also fosters the interdisciplinary collaboration that it aims ambitiously to achieve.

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